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Acalanes, Campolindo Win NCS Tournament

By Simon Tryzna



Andrew Merken #15

For the second straight year, Campolindo and Acalanes High School baseball teams left the North Coast Section tournament as champions. The victories come as no surprise since both teams were seeded number one in their respective divisions. As the defending champions with the top spot, after a two week tournament, the Cougars and the Dons proved they are the top teams on Saturday, June 2nd at O.Co Coliseum.

As the number one seed in the Division III bracket, Acalanes got a much needed bye in the first round before hosting San Marin High (MCAL), a rematch of last year's championship game. Acalanes' Johnny York pitched six scoreless innings in relief of Andrew Merken and shortstop A. J. Welsh drove in the winning run in the bottom of the eleventh, giving the Dons a 3-2 win.

The Dons then defeated Sonoma Valley (SCL) 9-4 to advance to the championship game in Oakland. After a surprise 11 - 7 win on the road at two-seeded Miramonte, the sixth-seeded Tamalpais Red Tailed Hawks were the surprise opponent in the championship.

The Dons scored two runs in each of the first two innings, enough to back up starter Merken, who no-hit Tamalpais. Following a walk and an error, Merken gave way to York who quickly got out of the sixth. After walking two in the seventh and giving up the only hit of the game, York closed the door on Tamalpais giving Acalanes the 4-0 win and securing the second straight title.

At the end of it all, Dons coach Justin Santich-Hughes was thrilled. Santich-Hughes noted that the program made a decision two years ago to get to a team to this place by cutting seniors in favor of sophomores. "Those sophomores are seniors now and we knew we'd have the team this year.

We built this, and it's so gratifying to see that pay off," he said.

Playing right after their Lamorinda rivals on Saturday at the A's home field, the Cougars were able to reach the championship game by blowing their first three opponents, winning by ten runs in each game.

The Cougars won 10-0 over Pinole Valley in five innings, and 13-3 over Cardinal Newman in six innings before facing upstart College Park in front of a full crowd in Moraga. Much like their first two games, the Cougars were able to pounce on the Falcons early, scoring four runs in the first before notching one run in both the second and the third innings. Brett Stephens hit two home runs and drove in four runs while Trent Shelton pitched a complete game shutout, giving Campolindo a 10-0 win.

The Cougars advanced to take on second-seeded conference rival, Dougherty Valley, for the championship. They became the three-time defending champions after a 6-3 win.

Campolindo got on the board early as Josh Cushing hit an RBI single to give the Cougars an early 1-0 lead against DVHS. The lead would hold until a throwing error by Campolindo allowed the Wild Cats to tie up the game in the bottom of the fourth. The Cougars were quick to respond as James Marvel drove in Stephens to give Campo a 2-1 lead. Later in the frame, Denis Karas hit a double to left field that plated two and gave the Cougars a four run cushion.

Dougherty Valley would not go down quietly and they scored two to cut Campo's lead to 5-3. However, Campolindo added one more in the top of the sixth and Tyler Luckhurst threw two scoreless innings to pick up the save 6-3, giving the Cougars their third DII title in as many years.

After the game, head coach Max Luckhurst noted that their success came from getting younger guys more experience. "We were in the quarterfinals and semifinals for years and years and years. I think the adjustment came when we gave the opportunity to some of the more physical freshmen coming in. It was this class to start off."

Miramonte:

The Mats defeated Encinal, 7-5, to match-up against the Tamalpais Red-Tailed Hawks. After two innings, the Matadors were comfortably ahead 6-0. However, the Hawks stormed back with a three-run fourth inning and finished the comeback by blowing the game open with an eight-run fifth inning that saw three Matador pitchers walk six batters, give up three hits, and hit one more batter. Combined with two errors in the inning, Miramonte found itself trailing 11-7.

After the game, Miramonte coach Vince Dell'Aquila gave credit where credit was due. "[Tamalpais] did a great job of hanging with it. They never stopped playing. I'm not saying we stopped, but ... that one inning just blew up on us."



Denis Karas #18 Photos Kevin Nguyen



A.J. Welsh #9

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